

# INTELLECTUAL LIFE IN THE PERIPHERY: A PERSONAL TALE

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## **1. Periphery's periphery**

"It is not your fault", a friend from New York told me in Berkeley some years ago, "that your parents took the wrong boat". Had they taken the right one, I would probably be a typical American intellectual Jew, right in the middle of everything. As it happened, I had to go through the experience of trying to become a social scientist starting, as it were, from the periphery's periphery. If it is true, as we learn in our discipline, that the external conditions for one's intellectual work is not irrelevant for what we do, then a personal account should have more than anecdotal interest.

From my grandfather's perspective in his small town in Bessarabia, "everybody" (meaning a neighbor who did it and got rich in few years) came to Rio de Janeiro in the

1910's. He left his family behind, worked as a peddler, and was trapped in Brazil during the war. Later he brought his family down, and became a reference name for relatives and friends willing to follow the same path. Rio, however, was an unhealthy place, and tuberculosis was rampant. My grandfather got ill, and decided to take his family to a new city being built in the mountains of Minas Gerais. He did not live long, and my father, only 14, had to quit school to take up his business and sustain the family. I was born in Belo Horizonte as the Second World War started, and carry my grandfather's name.

Bessarabian Jews were among the poorest, least educated and isolated Jewish groups searching for new life in America. Brazilian Jewish migration was far less significant and more recent than the North American or, for that matter, the Argentinian one. For those who knew and could, the first choice of destination was, of course, the United States, and second Buenos Aires. In Brazil, most European immigrants went to São Paulo and other southern states. Baron de Hirsch's Jewish Colonization Association financed part of Jewish migration to South America, and attempts were made to settle the newcomers in agricultural activities. However, most of them ended up in urban areas. Rio was the capital, São Paulo the booming center of Brazilian industrialization and the country's most cosmopolitan city. Belo Horizonte was an odd choice, and tuberculosis explains more than it is usually acknowledged<sup>1</sup>

To say that Minas Gerais was the periphery's periphery is no, however, quite true. In the Eighteenth Century gold had attracted to the region the attention and immigrants from all corners of the Portuguese empire. As the gold rush ended and the country moved towards independence in the early nineteenth century, Minas Gerais remained the seat of a complex, slave-based society that was to play a central role in the country's political life until the present day. The end of the gold economy left the region with a myriad of small urban settlements and, for the country, a fairly sophisticated and educated elite living off the products of cheap land worked by slaves transferred from the mines. Slavery in Minas Gerais was not part of a plantation, export-oriented economy, but linked to a mostly self-

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<sup>1</sup> The School of Medicine in Belo Horizonte, for instance, was formed early in this century by doctors who left Rio to the mountains in search for a cure for their disease. S. Schwartzman, 1969, p. 156-161.

centered social structure<sup>2</sup>. Forced into rural life by lack of alternatives, the "mineiro" elite remained fascinated with the urban world, and this probably explains why they built Belo Horizonte as an artificial town to become the state's administrative capital (Brasilia was also the project of a "mineiro", Juscelino Kubitschek).

The city developed slowly at first, as the children of landed families arrived to study and work in the state's growing bureaucracy, waiting, perhaps, for a chance to move to national politics. internal migration intensified after the Second World War, and the pace of modernization quickened. Belo Horizonte became one of the fastest growing cities in Brazil. It was a typical case of urbanization without industrialization. The city growth was fed by one of the largest population pools of pre-industrialized Brazil, those living in the small urban and rural settlements in Minas Gerais' countryside. People related to the state's traditional families came for jobs in the swelling bureaucracy or to work in new activities it stimulated. Poor immigrants came to serve the traditional families as they used to do in the past, to work in small industries and shops, and to live in squatter areas that sprouted around the city. As the service and public sector expanded and educational opportunities increased, a middle class started to emerge, which further attracted immigration from the stagnant countryside. In 1940 Belo Horizonte had 211 thousand inhabitants; they were 352 thousand in 1950, 683 thousand in 1960 and 1,235 thousand in 1970, with the growth rate slowing down in the last decade, reaching 1,780 thousand in 1980. It remained mostly an administrative town, and its social structure reproduced, as it were, the traditional social differences of the interior. Even today, when you say to someone in Minas Gerais that you are from Belo Horizonte, he will ask your family's name, and from which region it comes from. "Bessarabia" is not considered a proper answer.

Jewish and Middle-Eastern (mostly Syrian and Lebanese) immigrants were a minor part of this process. They worked mostly as small merchants, extending credit for salaried people to buy clothes, furniture and other consumption goods. As the local elite organized its own secondary schools and a University, some degree of universalism was

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<sup>2</sup> This interpretation of the slavery system in Minas Gerais is at deviance from the usual theories that link modern slavery with plantation economies. However, it makes sense from a broader view of Minas Gerais's history, and is also extremely well documented. Cf. Martins and Martins, 1983.

introduced, but educational choice followed clear rules. Traditional families sent their sons to Law school, and, to a lesser degree, to medicine or engineering. The Jewish community, as usual, invested in education, giving preference to fields where professional success was more related to intellectual achievement, that is, Medicine and Engineering. Few dared to take Law, and softer and less professional fields - social sciences, economics, literature, philosophy - was something for the third generation<sup>3</sup>. My father never quite accepted my decision to become a social scientist, without patients and fees to collect. That option, combined with a mixed marriage, compounded the periphery's periphery point of view from where I was supposed to work.

## **2. Intellectual life**

What kind of intellectual life, if any, one could expect in such a place? In a narrow sense, intellectual life can be taken as an effort to interpret one's particular situation with reference to a wider universe, a movement towards universalism. Karl Mannheim has captured a central dimension of intellectualism when he showed its relationship with social change and social mobility, and the need to redefine one's position in view of contrasting pressures, values and experiences. The same dimension appears in the psychological literature on identity, where the question of defining one's self in terms of its acceptance or rejection of others is crucial<sup>4</sup>. Two ingredients of intellectual life are, then, social mobility, new experiences, confrontation of values; and self-doubt. A third component, of course, is access to an intellectual tradition, without which other products besides "intellectual life" would be obtained.

Social mobility and self-doubt were both provided, in Minas Gerais, by historical decay and geographical provincialism. As the nineteenth century evolved, Brazilian politics developed around the urban court in Rio de Janeiro, the traditional nobility of the Northeast and the emerging coffee barons of Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais. As the country became independent from Portugal, professional schools of Engineering,

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<sup>3</sup> Brazilian universities started as collections of separate professional schools in Law, Engineering and Medicine, with lesser degrees like pharmacy, dentistry and architecture incorporated later on. General (and eventually scientific) education was provided by the "Schools of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters", which were essentially teacher's schools. For the beginnings of University of Minas Gerais, see Dias, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> See Mannheim, 1956, and Erick Erikson, 1968.

Law and Medicine were established in the country's largest cities - Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, Sao Paulo - and Minas Gerais was left out. Throughout the nineteenth century Sao Paulo slowly developed into its current place as the country's demographic, economic and, more recently, political center. During this time, Minas Gerais was influential, big and politically significant - but unmistakably stagnant. The new state capital was a sign of modernization and progress, a bold attempt to jump into modern times - but an attempt that, ultimately, failed.<sup>5</sup>

From this perspective one can see how a relatively small and peripheral town could show, relatively speaking, a remarkable intellectual history, as witnessed by the large number of writers, social scientists and politicians of national renown that it continuously produced. Education and intellectual life were possible for the elite, and there were no better alternatives.<sup>6</sup> The university itself tended to be rather mediocre, but literary and intellectually minded groups proliferated; from these circles came several known names in different cultural fields, most of them completing their careers and education elsewhere. The usual pattern would be for the students to follow the traditional careers, and abandon their intellectual pretensions as they entered adult life. There was some space, however, for some unusual talent to emerge, and for children with unknown names and origins to try their luck in the competitive space created by a university environment.

The presence of a University, the proximity of Rio de Janeiro (just one night's train away), the existence of a nationally oriented political elite, all these elements provided a clear notion that the world was much wider and interesting than what Belo Horizonte could provide. Only a tiny group, in fact, had true access to the wider world. Politics was the preferred road, but it depended, essentially, on good family ties.<sup>7</sup> For others,

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<sup>5</sup> The long-term stagnation of Minas Gerais in relation to Rio de Janeiro and, more specially, São Paulo, is not contradicted by eventual periods of economic growth in the second half of the nineteenth century, when coffee plantation started, or during the Kubitschek years in late fifties.

<sup>6</sup> There is some similarity between this situation and the one described by Joseph Ben-David for the German educational system in early nineteenth century, which provided also the main mobility channel for an emerging middle class (Ben-David, 1967).

<sup>7</sup> There is good evidence to show that power in that region was essentially played in terms of status and political access, rather than along some hidden "class" (meaning economic) interest groups. Entrepreneurial careers were almost non-existent for Minas Gerais' elites, except when linked with banking, public works and governmental contracts; agriculture tended to be traditional and oriented towards the internal market; export crops like coffee were limited to a few regions and included only a minor part of the state's

intellectual escapism provided provisional relief, a sense of transcendence and eventually a lifelong role of local intellectual prestige.<sup>8</sup> It is still very difficult for more universal intellectual or academic groups to get established and sustain their activities in Belo Horizonte through time, some good examples notwithstanding.

### **3. The search for identity: (I) primitivism**

Intellectual life in Brazil have always meant, to a great extent, the absorption of foreign influences. As a counterpart, there was always a sense of alienation, and search for a more authentic self. Portuguese heritage was, in one hand, the Counter Reform, embodied in the Catholic Church and in the philosophical and legal thinking which came from the University of Coimbra. But already in the eighteenth century the Portuguese themselves were looking outside for alternatives, in a movement that led to the modernization of Coimbra and the Jesuits' expulsion from the Portuguese Empire. The Jesuits and traditional Catholic thinking eventually returned, but from then on intellectual renewal - even Catholic renewal - usually meant to look outside, if possible to France, for larger horizons.

There was, however, a serious predicament. A colonial society such as Brazil, with its peculiar historical background - Portuguese bureaucrats and immigrants, African slaves, destroyed native cultures - could never adopt European institutions, values and ideals. At the same time, there was nothing to fall back to, even romantically - no glorious past, no native language, culture or religion<sup>9</sup>. If this was so in historical times, it did not improve with the pattern of internal differentiation and unequal development that followed economic growth in modern times.<sup>10</sup>

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population and elite. Some authors, however, would never accept such an anti-Marxist interpretation. See Cammack, 1980, as against Martins Filho, 1884a and 1984b. A detailed study of Minas Gerais' political elites was done by Wirth, 1977.

<sup>8</sup> For intellectual life in Belo Horizonte in the twenties and thirties, see Fernando Correia Dias, 1971; and the several volumes of Proustian memories by Pedro Nava, specially *Beira Mar* (Nava, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> There were several attempts to build such a past, through the glorification of Brazilian Indians, cultivation of military heroes and feats, idealization of "bandeirantes" and even a cultivation of the Brazilian "race". Some of that became even official, but, fortunately, few people ever took them seriously.

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of contemporary stratification and its impact on national building in Brazil, see Reis and Schwartzman, 1978.

No wonder that Brazilian intellectuals suffered acute identity problems, leading sometimes to ambitious formulations and significant cultural production. The best example of this reaction was probably Mario de Andrade. He was black, cultivated, and the main figure in the so-called "Modernist Movement" that swept the Brazilian intellectual groups in the twenties and put them in contact with European modern trends in painting, music, literature and poetry. He had a clear answer to the question of how to build a universally valid cultural life in a peripheral region like Brazil. "As we copy or repeat the German and French civilizations", he wrote to a young poet in 1925, "we are a bunch of primitives, because we are still in the period of mimicry".<sup>11</sup> "There is no Civilization. There are civilizations, each one geared by the needs and ideals of a given race, environment and time"<sup>12</sup>. For a Brazilian to become civilized, he had first to get in contact with its own primitivism, defined by its "sensuality, a taste for non-sense and a kind of sticky sentimentalism, a mixture of heroism, cowardice and courage, a propensity for politics and oratory".<sup>13</sup> He did not advocate the return to primitivism, however, as an anti-intellectual and irrationalist attitude that was to become so fashionable later. My primitivism, he would say, comes from "the awareness of a time and the social, national and human needs of this time. It is necessary. It is intellectual, and does not renounce to criticism, observation, experience and even scholarship. Only in appearance it departs from them. It is mine. It is necessary. My manifest art is above all a kind of preaching. And afterwards a demonstration".<sup>14</sup>

Mario de Andrade had a lasting influence in the renewal of Brazilian literature and poetry, but his message never went much beyond the sophisticated few who could understand the meaning of his combined use of European dada tactics, folklore symbols

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<sup>11</sup> "Nós, imitando ou repetindo a civilização francesa, ou alemã, somos uns primitivos, porque estamos ainda na fase do primitivismo". Letter to Carlos Drummond de Andrade in 1925 (Andrade, 1982, pp.16).

<sup>12</sup> "Não há Civilização. Há civilizações. Cada uma se orienta conforme as necessidades e idéias de uma raça, de um meio e de um tempo". (Andrade, 1982, p. 15).

<sup>13</sup> "A sensualidade, o gosto pelas bobagens um certo sentimentalismo melado, heroísmo, coragem e covardia misturados, uma propensão política e pro discurso". (Andrade, 1982, p. 102).

<sup>14</sup> - "... que vem da consciência de uma época e das necessidades sociais, nacionais e humanas desta época. É necessário. É intelectual, não abandona a crítica, a observação, a experiência e até a erudição. E só aparentemente se afasta delas. É o meu. É necessário. Minha arte aparente é antes de mais nada um pregação. Em seguida é uma demonstração". (Andrade, 1982, p. 26). .

and Portuguese language innovations. After Mario de Andrade, "Modernism" in Brazil took many faces: "anthropophagism", regional literature, "green and yellow", patriotic nationalism. Some names became well known outside Brazil, such as Gilberto Freyre in Pernambuco and Jorge Amado in Bahia. One can argue about how "authentically" each of these movements and authors captured the "true" and primitive nature of Brazilian culture. What they did best, in all probability, was to suggest a road towards a new national identity that did not exist before, and remained a counterpoint to the opposite trend, the search for universalism.<sup>15</sup>

#### **4. the search for identity: (II) universalism**

For Carlos Drummond de Andrade, the young poet from Minas Gerais with whom Mario de Andrade corresponded, the message that came across was essentially the proposed revolution in literary style and in the use of language, rather than the primitivist manifesto. For him and the next intellectual generation in Belo Horizonte (the so-called "generation of 45"), the purpose of intellectual life was to transcend local limitations, and could never mean a return to it. Minas Gerais produced excellent poets, but nothing similar to the militant literature so characteristic of the Brazilian Northeast. Their poetry was freer and their themes more local than with the previous generation; they seldom left, however, the realm of esthetics, and their inspiration remained unmistakably French.

Paris was traditionally very close to Brazilian elites. The country's schools of Medicine and Engineering followed French models, adopted French manuals, and even in the secondary schools French textbooks were utilized. French positivism provided Brazilian engineers and officers with intellectual justifications for their power aspirations, and French - inspired free masonry helped to limit the powers of the Church. The School of Mines created in the old capital of Minas Gerais, Ouro Preto, in the nineteenth century, was organized and ruled by a French engineer, and French presence was obviously intense in Belo Horizonte. Engineers were not, however, intellectuals. Mineiro intellectuals were mostly in the Law Schools, and, for them, French authors meant Balzac

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<sup>15</sup> Mario de Andrade was one of the few authentic icons in Brazilian cultural history, and his work and influence have been subject to a large number of studies. See, among many others, Almeida, 1981; Dassin, 1974; Dias, 1971; Martins, 1970; Miceli, 1979; Skidmore, 1974.



and Anatole France, rather than Rousseau, Comte or Saint-Simon. Why French political ideals did not arrive in Minas Gerais? One can imagine that its elite was too restricted and too closed to give space to libertarian ideologies. French was certainly the language of choice for active and militant intellectuals in Rio and São Paulo; but in Minas Gerais, it came as literature.

England was much closer to Brazil than France from an economic point of view, but had never the same intellectual influence<sup>16</sup>. For some years in the early twenty-century an English secondary schools existed in Belo Horizonte, and Pedro Nava, among others, studied there<sup>17</sup>. There was little trace of its influence in the city's cultural life, however, in the following decades. Three examples demonstrate how Brazilian culture resisted Anglo-Saxon influences. One is Gilberto Freyre, who studied in the United States in the thirties. Although he became respected for his international career, Freyre was always isolated figure in the Brazilian cultural milieu. The second is Anísio Teixeira, who studied at Colombia University in the twenties, brought to Brazil the ideas of John Dewey, and was very active in the educational reform movements in the thirties. Transposed to the Brazilian version of the French conflict between public (laic) vs. private (Catholic) education, his concern with community-based education was taken as a synonym of communism, and he was treated accordingly. A similar fate fell over Monteiro Lobato, also taken by many as a dangerous communist because of his sympathy towards the United States. One of the few noted influences of English thought in Brazil was Spencer evolutionism - but Auguste Comte was much closer.<sup>18</sup>

German influence in Brazilian social thought was much less pervasive. For a small group of speculative and influential scholars, however, German authors were decisive.

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<sup>16</sup> See Manchester, 1933, for the role played in England in Brazilian political and economic history.

<sup>17</sup> According to Pedro Nava, the English school where he studied in the 1910's in Belo Horizonte was a creation of the local elite; if this was so, it meant a radical departure from the expected pattern of Catholic education and French influences. There may be links, however, between this school and the British presence in the nearby gold mines of Morro Velho.

<sup>18</sup> Spencer was particularly influential in legal philosophy, where he had to compete, however, with strong German and Catholic influences (Paim, 1977). However, Comtean positivism was rampant among Engineers, army officers and politicians. The weight of French vs. English intellectual influences explains why economics, a typical English product, had until recently never received in Brazil an attention equivalent to the one provided to social and political studies. Cf. Morse, 1978.

Although a comprehensive analysis of this influence is still to be made, one could easily point out some items<sup>19</sup>. First, from Germany came the whole notion of a fully organized and rational state, and the whole Roman Law conception that pervaded the Brazilian legal thinkers. Rationalism came also through Kantian influences. Later, German authors were used to justify racially based social theories that were very common in the twenties and thirties, and led to the spreading of eugenic ideologies among the country's elites<sup>20</sup>. On the whole, the German influence tended to be rationalist and conservative, leading to the notion that the country could only develop and modernize through decisive actions of small, educated elites and a strong, centralized state.

However, as Brazil joined the allies in the Second World War, German language and authors became taboo, and social science became basically French. The University of São Paulo had already started to bring French social anthropologists and historians to teach - Claude Levy-Strauss, Roger Bastide, Paul-Arbusse Bastide - and for Rio de Janeiro the government had also imported French intellectuals with Catholic credentials<sup>21</sup>. After the war, French social sciences became popular, less because of its own intellectual tradition - like Durkheimian sociology - than through the translation and popularization of pre-war German philosophy and social thought - phenomenology, existentialism and Marxism.<sup>22</sup>

### **5. The search for identity: (III) Judaism**

It is curious how European influence, combined with the existence of sizeable European immigrant groups, did not lead to the development of strong immigrant-based cultural movements in Brazilian society. One can imagine that, as Brazilians looked outside for transcendence and new horizons - or inside for their "true" self - the immigrants would put their energies into getting accepted by their new country. Immigrants were not only foreigners; they came also from the lower strata in their own societies. For them, and

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<sup>19</sup> An overview of German influence in Brazilian philosophical thought was provided by Reale, 1974.

<sup>20</sup> See for instance N. Stepan, 1984.

<sup>21</sup> This attempt to build a State university based on French conservative Catholicism Brazil is described in Schwartzman, Bomeny and Costa, 1984.

<sup>22</sup> In the University of São Paulo, however, French sociology came first, and German/French Marxism later, as witnessed by the works of Florestan Fernandes, Octavio Ianni, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and others. An open chapter in the sociology of sociology is the study of different consequences of young, middle - and old-age fascination with Marxism among social scientists. Cf. Cardoso, 1985.

more so for the second generation, to move upwards meant to abandon their original language, habits and traditions, and to incorporate those of the upper classes in their new environment<sup>23</sup>. The most significant deviation was provided by the Germans, who tried hard to reproduce in the new country their schools, churches and community organizations, and keep their national loyalty to Germany. In the thirties, German and Brazilian nationalism clashed, and repression became more legitimate when, to remain German became tantamount, for many on both sides, to be loyal to the Third Reich. Similar confrontations occurred between Brazilian authorities and Italian and Japanese colonies (by chance, the largest foreign colonies in Brazil came from the Axis countries)

The situation was not different for the small Jewish - Brazilian community. There was, on one side, religious and cultural differences that made assimilation much more difficult than, for instance, for the Italians. On the other side, there was the same drive for participation and integration, and the obvious insufficiencies of an immigrant culture.

The Jewish community in Belo Horizonte in the fifties had about 500 families, sharply divided on ideological grounds. The largest - and probably poorest - part called themselves "progressive", and cultivated Yiddish. To be "progressive" meant to cultivate memories some of them had of ties with European trade-union and union-based political movements - the Bund (Jewish Labor Alliance of Russian, Poland and Lithuania), communist and socialist parties - and do what they could to keep alive their communal activities and Yiddish-based cultural life, in a version of what Weber would call "pariah intellectualism".<sup>24</sup> My mother, who came from a dismantled but well educated Polish

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<sup>23</sup> The American experience was similar in the sense that the first and second generation pressed for integration and assimilation. Only in the third generation, on the evidence of the limits of assimilation, did the new search for roots, ethnic and religious values started, doing away with the dreams of the "melting pot". The main difference is that Brazilian elites were never self-assured, always worried about their racial impurity and longed for a future of progressive whitening. See Skidmore, 1974.

<sup>24</sup> Other immigrant groups in Brazil also kept their ideological ties with European political movements. Particularly known is the presence of anarchist ideals within Italian workers at the beginning of the century. The organization of self-help societies was also widespread. There were, however, important differences. Italians anarchists went to work in the first industrial and Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and could get organized around their working places. The Jews, however, were mostly small merchants, and their social organization was based on cultural and religious activities within their families. Italians, Spanish, Portuguese and Lebanese immigrants were usually Catholic, an assimilation factor the Jews did not share. On Anarchism in Brazil see Maram, 1977.

family, was very active in the Yiddish theater, chorus singing and ladies' reading tea parties.

The other sector kept abreast with the Zionist movement, tried to learn Hebrew and established whatever links they could with Israel and international Zionist organizations. The cleavage was not simply ideological. It was based on different social strata and probably on other non-explicit differences of origins and Yiddish dialects.<sup>25</sup> They kept separate social clubs, schools and synagogues, and only the young, looking for partners in such a closed community, dared to mix with the other side.<sup>26</sup> As the State of Israel was created and the socialist countries gradually sided with the Arabs in the Middle-East confrontation, the "progressive" side slowly disintegrated, while the "Zionist" group became more markedly religious, Hebrew and Israeli oriented. In short, there was little space in Belo Horizonte - and, for that matter, in Brazil - for the development of a Jewish-oriented, educated intellectual group. The Yiddish, immigrant subculture was poor and dying, while the upcoming Hebrew, Zionist alternative meant political conservatism and either emigration to Israel or continuous isolation from local society.

In short, the perspectives for the immigrants' second generation were not very different from the ones open for the children of decaying or upcoming families arriving in Belo Horizonte from the state's hinterland. It made no sense to strive to get involved in local culture and traditions, and places at the very top were monopolized by the children of families with proper surnames and towns of origin. The only chances were to find an acceptable niche in one of the new liberal professions, to make some money in business or to look for some kind of intellectual activity which could be truly universal, did not depend either on local nor on immigrant traditions - and did not require too much in terms of sophisticated mastery of European cultures. For many people in Belo Horizonte and, to a growing extent in Brazil in the fifties and sixties, this meant the social sciences.

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<sup>25</sup> There were also some Sephardim and a group of better educated German Jews who did not interact much with either side of the mostly Ashkenazi, Central-European community.

<sup>26</sup> Marriage was a serious problem in such a small and divided community, and those who could send their daughters regularly to mingle with the larger Jewish communities in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Convenience marriages were still widespread in my generation, with the brides usually richer (and often uglier) than the grooms.

## 6. The search for identity: (IV) sociology

I was very influenced, as an undergraduate student, by a book by Lucien Goldmann called *Science Humaines et Philosophie*<sup>27</sup>. Goldmann had had access to Georgy Luckacs' *History and not Class Consciousness* when this was still a forbidden book, and not yet translated into French or English. Following Luckacs, Goldmann sustained that there were two social sciences, bourgeois and proletarian. Each one was true as far as it went, but, since the future belonged to the working class, proletarian sociology (that is, Marxism) went much further and was therefore better. Those were post-Stalin years, and French Marxism was full of attempts to return to the "true" origins of Marxism (usually meaning the philosophical texts and Hegel) and use them to recreate a social science that Stalin had aborted. Besides Goldmann, we read Edgar Morin. Pierre Naville, Henri Lefèbre, the group around the journal *Arguments* - and, of course, Jean-Paul Sartre. We also read what remained of the Durkheimian school in the post-war years, and tried to make some sense of George Gurvitch's "sociologie en profondeur". For all that, one had to at least understand some of the basic ideas of critical philosophy, Hegelianism, post-Hegelianism and phenomenology.

What was so seductive in Goldmann's book was the Marxist notion that true science and universal knowledge were based not at the top, but at the bottom of the social structure. Seen from a peripheral, underdeveloped country, this idea was easily translated into national terms. The world was organized into bourgeois (which included the Soviet Union!) and proletarian countries, and these, because they were poorer and not committed to the *statu quo*, held the future's key. The breaking down of the Colonial empires, the Bandung Conference, the rising of nationalism in Africa and Asia, where all signs of a new era in the making. Conventional Marxism was not adequate to account for all this, and in Rio a group of intellectuals attempted to develop a new kind of social thought which would incorporate Hegelianism, phenomenology, modern economics, social and political science and become the foundation of a new and truer universalism: a new kind

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<sup>27</sup> L. Goldmann, 1952.

of nationalism of the left<sup>28</sup>. Alberto Guerreiro Ramos, one of the best known names of the Rio group, once stated to me and my colleagues in Belo Horizonte that, if Latin America held the future of the world, we, in Minas Gerais, held the future of Latin America - and who else, besides ourselves, future social scientists in this privileged location, held the key to Minas Gerais? We all believed wholeheartedly. Some years later a mitigated version of this intellectual movement arrived at the center under the name of "dependency theory", to which we shall return.

The second fascinating element in Marxist thought was the notion of praxis, that is, the indissolubility between theory and practice. Thanks to praxis, intellectuals would cease to be alienated and isolated, and get involved with real life. Society's consciousness had to be raised by the intellectuals, and, when this happened, they would naturally assume their leadership role. Finally, sociology - and not just Marxism - promised a way of understanding society and politics that went supposedly deeper than the traditional legal approach monopolized by the upper classes. Through sociology the State and its legalistic structure could be beaten both politically and ideologically. The opposition between Law and Sociology, therefore, was much more than a matter of intellectual specialization. It was perceived as an actual clash of political orientations that confronted, in the politicized university environment of the late fifties and early sixties, the inheritors of the traditional classes with a new, rising and truly universal intellectuality.

In short, social sciences offered a way to leave forever the periphery and jump right into the center of things - to be in the center of world revolution, to participate in the construction of a new and better social science, and to gain power and prestige. The entrance door to this future was the university. That is where the ideological battle had to be won, and besides, it was quite conveniently at hand.

Student politicization, of course, is an old Latin American tradition, and in this sense there was nothing really new in this movement from social science to political activism except, perhaps, two things. First, its new Marxian (or, for some groups, born-again Catholic) garments. And second, the involvement of groups, which, for their social

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<sup>28</sup> This group was organized around the Brazilian Institute of Superior Studies (ISEB), which was extremely influential in Brazil in the late fifties and early sixties (cf. Toledo, 1978).

origins and sheer numbers, could not be as easily, assimilated by the elites as the literary minded and bohemian law students of previous decades.

To reflect on the social sciences and conclude that it should lead to political participation is one thing; to learn about this conclusion without reflecting about it is quite another. Sociological intellectualism was followed in many cases by anti-intellectualism, and efforts to come up with a better Marxism tended to turn into rekindled Trotskyism. For those who followed the post-Stalinist debates of French intellectuals, however, a return to Luckacsian proletarian sociology would never do. How could one get involved in practical work without abandoning intellectual life and all that it meant? Would the French, who were so thoroughly revising conventional Marxism - or even the Americans, who never cared much about it in the first place, while being so pragmatic - have an answer?

## **7. Center vs. periphery: the perverted mirror**

An unintended feature of going abroad is that, as you look at other people and try to learn about them, they look at you with very definite expectations. What you see is not what they actually are, but that kind of face they are prone to offer you; and what they get is, of course, your reaction to it. The mirror game produces distorted perceptions on both sides, and can go a long way in explaining the sorry state of center-periphery intellectual relations that tends to prevail.

The Latin American School of Social Sciences in Santiago de Chile (FLACSO) was an unusual academic setting in the early sixties, when I went there for graduate studies. As a UNESCO sponsored institution, it still shared the enlightenment ideals that presided the establishment of UNESCO in the post-war years. Its faculty was mostly European, and there was an authentic - although often frustrated - attempt to develop a Latin American "problematique" through the utilization of whatever theoretical and methodological tools were available. Its eclecticism was often infuriating to the more intellectually minded students, but the whole project was captivating. After all, we were in the best social sciences institution in the Continent, and learning from the more updated European and North-American literature - just a step from universalism!

It was quite possible that the perverted mirror was already at work in that context.<sup>29</sup> In my own experience, however, it only became clearer as I moved to other international experiences. The first thing I learned was that, for an European or North American, I was a "Latin American": they had no concepts to distinguish among them, and did not care to do it. In Scandinavia a few years later, I was a kind of curiosity, and people were deceived to realize that I was not the exotic revolutionary guerrilla I was supposed to be. My colleagues in graduate school at Berkeley in the late sixties were discovering political participation, reading Sartre and fascinated with the realization that there might be something wrong with the American Way of Life; they could hardly understand why I was so interested in learning what American social scientist had to say. It was an interest that could no be completely fulfilled: as a Latin American I was "naturally" placed within the university's regional program and area specialists, and it took me a precious time to discover that there were other (and probably more interesting) things happening on campus.

The perverted mirror has broader and more serious consequences. Patronizing from center to peripheral intellectuals comes in two types, "right" and "left".<sup>30</sup> The typical "rightist" approach is to assume that peripheral intellectuals are obviously second-class, and can only remain as field workers for their better endowed and theoretically minded counterparts in the center. The typical product of this mirror is the "comparative studies" book: one introductory, conceptual chapter written by the regional specialist at the center, and a series of country studies done by local people. It is an arrangement that benefits both sides, provided the ones doing the fieldwork do not attempt to write the theoretical

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<sup>29</sup> - For instance, there was no place in FLACSO for a "sociology of sociology" which could place its own work within a larger interpretive framework. This was probably a consequence of the schools's "scientific" stand, which was intended as a movement against the over ideological thinking prevailing the region. Ultimately, however, this lack of reflection on its own assumptions explains some of the difficulties is found in taking roots in the area.

<sup>30</sup> "Left" and "right" are written with quotations because the two approaches are often interchangeable. It has been argued, for instance, that the lack of concern for human rights and democratic values is part of Latin America's cultural heritage, which should be respected or at least understood without ethnocentrism by Western democracies. See as an example Wiarda, 1980.



pieces.

"Leftist" patronizing starts with guilt feelings about the center. One should not look at non-Western cultures and societies with Western eyes. One should not deal with them according to our own values. One should respect their traditions, value, systems, aspirations. Since we have obviously been exploring them for so long, we should also understand and forgive them for hating us. If the "rightist" mirror forces the peripheral intellectual to conform to the center's expectations, the "leftist" one forbids him to do it. To learn foreign languages, to think in terms of international intellectual traditions, to look for common problems and realities among underdeveloped and developed countries, all these are signs of alienation from local culture and reality that should not be stimulated. "Local" intellectuals should never abandon their cultural specificity if they want to be recognized as "authentic" and receive the benefits of international recognition. Thus, as contacts increase among intellectuals in the center and in periphery, the mirrors increase their perverted role of keeping the latter in their place. On one hand, the abundance of "cooperative" research that often makes sense only from the center's point of view; on the other, the institutional patronizing for "authentic", "concerned" and "local" work.

The case of dependency theory is a good example of how the perverted mirrors work. Decolonization after the Second World War made evident that social and political realities in peripheral countries could not be fully understood without considering their links of dependency with the center. There was nothing new in these ideas, already manifest from E. M. Foster's *A Passage to India* to Lenin's writings on Imperialism. In the forties, French sociologists, Georges Balandier among others, were already writing about the dependency of African nations; in the fifties and early sixties these were common ideas in social sciences circles in Latin America.<sup>31</sup> It soon became clear, however, that the concept of "dependency" was too general to account for complex differences in widely distinct peripheral societies, and that it led to a tendency to disregard each society's specific features and historical processes.

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<sup>31</sup> See for instance Cândido Mendes, 1963.

At the same time, dependency theory entered in Western Europe and the United States and was received in many circles as a major theoretical innovation, mostly through the works of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Falleto, on one hand, and Andrew Gunther Frank on the other. Without going into the debate about the academic merit of their writings,<sup>32</sup> it is clear that their notoriety should be explained basically by the way they met the overall climate in North American and European academic circles in the late sixties. The "consumption of dependency theory", in Cardoso's own words, became a ritual.<sup>33</sup> Looking at peripheral countries through these glasses, Europeans and North Americans would see mostly their own sins, and those people in these regions more ready to proclaim them. Dependency theory then returned to Latin American endowed with new international respectability, and ready to challenge those that had gone beyond it the past.

## **8. Mid-journey**

One can conclude, paradoxically, that intellectual life in the periphery is not very different from elsewhere. As always, it depends on one's social, historical and cultural conditions; it has a strong element of soul-searching and want of identity; it results from a special combination of chances, opportunities and also dead ends, false starts, and possibilities that are either taken up or left unexplored.

The intellectual, or identity component helps to explain why social sciences in the periphery have usually a strong historical component, and in that sense are closer to the European than to the North American tradition. I am certainly not unique in that my first published works were historical studies on the Brazilian political system.<sup>34</sup> The questions I addressed are classical: how can one explain the peculiar characteristics of a country like Brazil, its inability to develop fully a modern democracy and industrial society? These types of studies are necessarily historical, because they are, in a way, attempts to

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<sup>32</sup> See Cardoso and Falleto, 1979, and A. G. Frank, 1967. For a discussion, see the symposium published by the *Latin American Research Review*, vol. XVII, n° 1, and particularly the comments by Halperin-Donghi and Packenham.

<sup>33</sup> Cardoso, 1977.

<sup>34</sup> See S. Schwartzman, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1982; and Reis and Schwartzman, 1978.

define one's country identity; and they have to deal with politics, given the assumption that it is through power (over oneself, over one's country) that one's identity can be changed. At the same time, they are attempts to avoid the perverted mirror's trap. In this particular case, I was led to look at Brazil from a general (mostly Weberian), not "local" perspective; to stress the country's internal processes, rather than "dependency" mechanisms; and to go beyond the methodological limits of academic convention in the use of secondary sources and attempts at general interpretations.<sup>35</sup>

Other studies that followed tended to concentrate in the country's cultural history and institutions, while keeping the political dimension in the background.<sup>36</sup> The reasons why these studies were made are, as usual, a combination of opportunities, interests and possibilities. They were fragmented, in the sense that there was no effort to integrate them systematically in a coherent pattern; they were also combined with a couple of more strictly "scientific", quantitative research projects, with findings restricted to more specialized audiences. They were also open, in the sense that they were typically mid-journey studies, and did not lead any specific "next step" to be followed. On hindsight, however, it is clear that they fit a pattern, which this article describes and to which it pertains.

The identity problem is the central feature of intellectual life in the periphery. In the absence of a well-structured academic milieu, confronted with the dilemmas of primitivism vs. universalism, engagement vs. intellectual independence, faced with the disturbing effects of perverted mirrors, intellectuals in the periphery are always under strong pressures to incorporate one of the several identity kits they encounter through their life and to be absorbed by them. It is probably more difficult to be always in mid-journey, to coexist with a fragmented past and to accept the impossibility of integrating it in a coherent life project and perspective, than to have one's social position defined from the beginning, and not actually open for discussion.

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<sup>35</sup> How successfully this was done is besides the point for this discussion, and impossible for me to evaluate. It is interesting to point out, however, that it was very difficult for such an approach to penetrate the country's intellectual debate, since it did not fit easily into the existing paradigms. The situation has improved significantly in this regard in recent years.

<sup>36</sup> See S. Schwartzman, 1978 and 1984; Schwartzman et alii, 1979; and Schwartzman, Bomeny and Costa, 1984.

But it is also more interesting. It is precisely this identity problem what differentiates the intellectual from the professional and well-established social scientists, as well as from those who adapt too easily to one of the faces of the mirrors game. Which one should be preferred? It would seem that good quality social sciences can not be produced without a significant intellectual component. If this is true, intellectual life at the periphery still has a chance.

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